

USDA's decision comes after Representatives wrote on behalf of NJ farmers in March

Washington, DC – Today, Congressmen Frank LoBiondo (NJ-02) and John Adler (NJ-3) applauded the Department of Agriculture's decision to purchase up to \$18 million worth of cultivated cranberry products for federal nutrition programs. Back in March, LoBiondo and Adler wrote Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack requesting that the Department purchase surplus cranberries.

"South Jersey's cranberry crop is a key economic component of our region's agricultural industry and yields tens of millions of dollars in revenue annually. I am pleased by the USDA's decision, which will benefit our farmers and federal nutrition programs," said LoBiondo. "I also want to applaud the contributions of our farmers to local food banks, which have certainly made a difference in these challenging economic times."

"New Jersey's farmers deserve their fair share of federal resources," Congressman John Adler said. "This decision will benefit South Jersey's economy and provide a boost for local farmers. I am pleased that Washington listened and decided to purchase nutritious cranberries from our local farmers."

New Jersey is the country's third largest producer of cranberries. The \$18 million allocations will purchase cranberries and cranberry products for federal nutrition programs, including the School Lunch Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The letter that Representatives LoBiondo and Adler sent to Secretary Vilsack can be found below:

March 29, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Indiana Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-0001

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We fear the market conditions which caused a dramatic drop in U.S. cranberry prices from 1999-2000 are on the verge of repeating themselves. Due to the worldwide economic situation and a record U.S. cranberry crop in 2008, our growers are once again faced with a surplus. The USDA Cranberry Marketing Committee is projecting inventories to grow nearly 100 percent, to over 6 million barrels, by 2011. Upon the surplus of 2000, USDA made large purchases in excess of 61 million pounds to stabilize the market and return profitability to our producers. Since then, its purchases have significantly dropped, recently falling to just over 1 million pounds. At the current level of purchases, the industry will not be able to maintain market prices covering the cost of production, and this is a matter of great concern to us. We therefore write to urge that you give priority once again to purchases of cranberry products for the USDA surplus removal.

For the cranberry industry's part, they have developed new foreign markets, introduced new products, and conducted an aggressive promotion program on the health benefits of cranberries. However, according to the industry, it is essential for USDA to maintain purchases for the coming year in an area that is at least equal to the FY2006 level of just over 16 million pounds. The nutritional value of cranberries is exceptionally high and cranberry products are accordingly beneficial in USDA programs. USDA has been working effectively with cranberry growers throughout our states. We are grateful for that assistance and hope very much that it can be substantially increased so that the hardships now facing this important industry may be avoided.

With respect and appreciation.

Sincerely,